

JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
EDWARD A. BLATT

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JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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Interviewers

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INTERVIEWER: John Shankland

INTERVIEWEE: Edward A. Blatt

INTERVIEWEE: This is an interview with Mr. Ed Blatt for the Joliet Junior College Oral History Project by John Shankland at Fitzgerald's Furniture Store, April 6, 1976, at 2:30 p.m.

SHANKLAND: O.K., Mr. Blatt, the first thing that I would like to talk to you about today is if you could maybe tell me a little about your background, your family life.

BLATT: Yes, I'd be very glad to. I was born in Elwood on August the 22nd, 1902. And I'm very happy to assist John in this oral history concerning the little Village of Elwood and Jackson Township. I have resided in Elwood for the past 27 years. Previous to that I lived in Joliet for a period of 10 years. My parents were Anna Hempill Blatt and Neil N. Blatt. My dad came from Denmark and settled in the city of Chicago and then to the little village of Elwood. My mother was Pennsylvania Dutch and came west in the early days of Jackson Township.

SHANKLAND: Are you an only child?

BLATT: I had 2 brothers; my mother was married the second time, to my father. My half-brother was Nile Hempill who lived in Elwood for approximately 15 years, then moved to Richmond, Virginia. My older brother lived in Elwood until



1918. Then he left and lived in Cincinnati. However, both of them now are deceased. I am the last living relative in my generation. I am very proud of the little town of Elwood. It originally started out as a family farming community, great many farms in the area. Elwood, of course, probably was used as a grain-distributing center for the surrounding farms.

SHANKLAND: What type of work did your father carry on for a living?

BLATT: My father was a carpenter by trade; he and his other brother erected many of the old farm buildings and farm homes in this area. And, of course, in those days a carpenter would go to these homes or to the farms, and if they were to build a new barn or house, would live at the home until the job was completed. A different type of construction was used. They would have what was known as barn-raising days. The two carpenter boys would build the sides of the barn flat on the ground, and then they would have what was known as a barn-raising day where all the neighbors would come around and come to the farm and they would literally take a hold of the sides and raise them upright and put them in position and then work from that point on. I do not remember the barn-raising incidents, as, of course, I was very, very young at that time. Then I attended the Elwood School at the age of six. My father decided that he had enough of the carpenter work, and he wanted to take things a little bit easy so he



and his brother started a hardware store. Now, as I recall, I was probably 8 to 14 years of age during this time. They had the only hardware store in Elwood and serviced a great area around the village of Elwood.

SHANKLAND: How did your father get interested in the hardware business?

BLATT: Just because they needed somebody that could, probably deal in nails and tinware, wagons, buggies and farm machinery that was used on the farm at that time and also heating stoves. The heating stoves at that time were hard coal heaters. They would take your hard coal heaters and at the end of the season would bring them into their little hardware store, install new isinglass and store them until next fall, then return them to the homes. This went on until the event of the furnace. And that did away with the hard coal stoves and the hard coal heaters; and, of course, there were a great many cook stoves in those days. I remember my own mother using the cook stoves in our kitchen and on the end of it was a reservoir. There was no inside bath facilities. It was all outside utilities, and for baths we would heat the water in the reservoirs in the cook stoves and then transfer it into tubs to take our Saturday afternoon--Saturday evening baths.

SHANKLAND: When did your father open this hardware store?

BLATT: Well, I'm not sure of the date. I would say it was probably about 1901 or probably 1895, in that area.



SHANKLAND: And it was Blatt Brothers Hardware. . . ?

BLATT: It was known as Blatt Brothers Hardware. My uncle (also one of the three brothers that came together to Elwood) decided that he would run a grocery store, and he opened a little grocery store in Elwood. And I can remember it as just a town of the hardware store, the post office, one tavern (in those days they were known as saloons), one little rookery (that was the name given to a pool hall), and he also had a candy shop. And as I can remember Elwood at that time, it had nothing but dry, dirt roads. In the summertime the roads would be very dusty and very dirty; and if it was a real dry summer, the sun would be so hot that we as youngsters were always barefoot. We never wore shoes in the summertime. And the roads would get so hot that you would just run to keep yourself cool.

SHANKLAND: In this hardware store what were some of the cheap products that were sold?

BLATT: Well---there were buggies, harness, buggy whips, all sorts of building materials, nails, tools, all such things that were needed to repair farm machinery---also gutters for the homes.

SHANKLAND: And you owned the last single-seat buggy sold then by Blatt Brothers Company?

BLATT: I have in my possession to this day the last buggy that was sold from my dad's hardware store.



SHANKLAND: O.K., what customers were quite dependent for good sales, I mean what customers did you depend on for most of your sales?

BLATT: Practically all the sales were made to farmers and home owners in Elwood.

SHANKLAND: Farmers?

BLATT: They would buy wagons, they would buy buggies, harnesses, and also plows and all types of machinery used on farms.

SHANKLAND: So the hardware store did handle a number of good farm products?

BLATT: They had a number of good farm products, anything that was needed on the farm they were able to distribute.

SHANKLAND: In the production of these goods, what they went through in making them, what different methods were used then as compared to now?

BLATT: Now just repeat that again.

SHANKLAND: I mean in the production of these goods, what different methods were used to make them? How did they go about making these goods? Compared to how they do today?

BLATT: Well, of course, that was-- all done by the factories. They'd purchase from Barrett Hardware Company, a wholesaler



in Joliet, and then they would resell to the farmers. I did forget to mention that in this little village there was a blacksmith shop, and that was a very interesting place. This is where the farmers would bring their horses in to be shod; and I, as a boy, used a fly-swatter (made from a stick with the hair of a horse's tail.) My job was to shoo the flies to keep the horse quiet. They also sharpened the plow-shares in this little blacksmith shop. Next adjoining the blacksmith shop was a wheelwright with a man by the name of Dennis Kirk, who would actually in his own little shop make wagon wheels. That is a lost art today.

SHANKLAND: These things that were made---were many of them handmade, I mean, or were they factory-produced?

BLATT: No, they were not handmade except the wagon wheels. They were purchased through Barrett's Hardware Company, a Joliet distributor .

SHANKLAND: How about your wood products?

BLATT: Wood products would be handmade. The wagon wheels would be made by hand, but any of the metallic pieces were purchased, or any of the farm implements were purchased through different wholesalers, such as Barrett Hardware and Hibbert-Spencer-Barlett of Chicago. Then they would be redistributed through our area.

SHANKLAND: From the sounds of things it seems like you've always wanted to follow in your father's footsteps into the



hardware business. Is this necessarily true?

BLATT: Not necessarily. I was never too much interested in the hardware business as a business, because the town was real small, and I didn't think that I wanted to become a part of that. So at the end of my grade school education I attended Joliet Township High School in the year of 1916; and after coming to the high school, I became very much interested in band work in the high school band because Mr. A. R. McAllister was then director. He was also born in Elwood. I was interested in the band and asked him if I could play some instrument which he said he would be glad to have me in the band, and from then on I stayed with the band for four years and graduated from the high school in 1920. However, during high school days on Saturdays and after school, I worked for the West Music Company which was again a part of the high school band in one sense. And I think I have received more good, more--I just don't know how to explain it--more--just good deeds and good thoughts from Mr. McAllister. He was to me a genius in every sense of the word.

SHANKLAND: Yes, I remember him.

BLATT: A strict man as far as discipline was concerned, and his discipline carried out throughout the band and throughout the high school and throughout every one of the boys' lives that he was in contact with.

SHANKLAND: So what did you really want to go into if it wasn't hardware?



BLATT: Well, I figured I would go into retail trade; and I had an opportunity to become acquainted with the Leath Furniture Company in Joliet, which is still in Joliet, and from then on I worked for the Leath Company for a period of six years. Then Mr. Fitzgerald and the rest of us boys in the Leath organization decided to go into business for ourselves. So we dissolved from that company and started our own company in 1928.

SHANKLAND: Who helped you--- who helped guide you along in this? Was it Mr. Fitzgerald?

BLATT: Mr. Fitzgerald was the manager of the Leath Company at that time and who we as youngsters worked for. He was a very marvelous retail businessman. He was a very honest individual, and his teachings are still being used in our business today.

SHANKLAND: I understand it to be--- that many people lived in Elwood and worked outside in larger towns. Is this true?

BLATT: Well, quite a few of them did, yes. In the residence of Elwood there were lawyers and there were different tradesmen. There were carpenters and there were plumbers and they would probably come into Joliet and work out of Joliet, and out of Wilmington, out of Manhattan.

SHANKLAND: What was the main occupation of workers in Elwood during this time? Was it carpentry and that type of thing?

BLATT: It was retail trade and carpentry work, yes.

SHANKLAND: How about the grocery stores, and the post office and that? Were there a lot of people involved in that?

BLATT: No, there wasn't. Just the people that lived in Elwood, there was nothing, no fanfare, as it was a very quiet little town.

SHANKLAND: I understand farming, as you mentioned earlier, was the big highlight in Elwood. And could you tell me a little bit why it was?

BLATT: Strictly because it was an ideal farming community. The ground is in just perfect farming soil. It's black soil and very productive. And the grain, of course, was the corn, oats, and wheat. And it was taken to the elevators in Elwood and then sent in to Chicago.

SHANKLAND: This is why so many people farmed?

BLATT: That's why it's a farming area.

SHANKLAND: O.K., how did people leave the farms?

BLATT: Principally because the government, in 1941, I believe, came down and purchased thousands of acres of real fine farm land, the finest farm land in the State of Illinois, and they bought all the farms and the buildings. They tore down the buildings, and they turned it into an arsenal for the Army.

SHANKLAND: How did they leave the farm, like when retirement or something came up? How was it given to somebody else?

BLATT: Well, it was generally handed down from family to family. It was never sold. It was just handed down; but when the government came along, nothing mattered. They just came in and said we want this land, and they bought it from the farmers and the price at that time, I think, was probably around 7- or \$800 an acre. Today that farm land is valued at probably from 15- to \$5000 an acre.

SHANKLAND: That's a drastic change. Did your father do any farming whatsoever?

BLATT: No. He was not a farmer in any sense.

SHANKLAND: Has your family ever acquired some land in Elwood? Has there ever been any land that's been a part of your family?

BLATT: I now have 115 acres of farm land on the Manhattan blacktop.

SHANKLAND: I see. I've read that the village of Elwood contains and still does contain some of the best farms in Will County. Can you give me some examples of some people who you might know who have some of the better farm land.

BLATT: Yes. The Coldwater family. Now LaVerne is the son of the owner of that land and has now been willed that farm, and his property consisted of approximately 8--900 acres of the finest farm land in that area. And there are other farms east of Elwood that have never been any part of the Arsenal,

so that remains in the families as before.

SHANKLAND: For what reasons did farmers naturally journey to larger cities, such as Wilmington and Joliet and I guess even some, I've read it have gone as far as Chicago? I didn't understand why they'd do this?

BLATT: Because there were no stores and they thought they could get better prices if they traveled to a larger city, which is true today.

SHANKLAND: How did this effect the business of Elwood? Store-wise?

BLATT: Well, as far--as it was never a thriving retail business because it was limited in the amount of business that could be done. So it did not make a big dent in commercial trade.

SHANKLAND: In regards to work, what type of jobs were carried on by the women?

BLATT: They were housewives.

SHANKLAND: Housewives?

BLATT: Yes. There was very little other work than taking care of the homes. They also planted gardens, raised chickens and were practically self-supporting.

SHANKLAND: Did any of them work jobs of men such as farming, did any of them do any type of farming?

BLATT: No.

SHANKLAND: Now I would like to talk a little bit about education during the 1900's. First of all was school a necessity in the early 1900's?

BLATT: Very much so. As I recall the school, there were 2 classrooms in the Elwood school running from one to five, I believe, and from six to eight. Now how they were divided I've forgotten, and there were two teachers. First, second, third, and fourth grade were in one room, as I recall; and one teacher taught all grades. And one teacher taught fifth, sixth and seventh and eighth grades in the other room. And it made no difference if she was teaching second grade, the first graders would have their work and the third and fourth graders would pay no attention to the teacher. That is the way it was done.

SHANKLAND: How many attended school would you say?

BLATT: I would say in my time it was probably 20 or 25 in each room.

SHANKLAND: I see. Could you tell me a little bit about what the school was like. You know how the teaching was and how classroom reactions with the teacher were?

BLATT: Well, it was different than what it is today. The teacher had the ruling hand. There was no fooling around. If you needed a strap, you got the strap, in which I wish

they would do today. I wish they would strap a few of these boys and girls and teach them how to behave themselves, but they just don't do it. They're afraid to---they'll sue the teacher, which to me is wrong. And another things, I know this for a fact, they ought to go back to reading, writing and arithmetic cause we have youngsters coming in the store that are looking for positions and it's pitiful, they can't even write or spell, let alone add a column of figures.

SHANKLAND: Yeah, it's sad.

BLATT: And it's a sad situation.

SHANKLAND: What school did you attend?

BLATT: Elwood School, and Joliet Township High School.

SHANKLAND: What teachers do you remember most?

BLATT: The teachers --- I had Miss Fannie Bruce, I'll never forget. She was one of the finest individuals that God ever made.

SHANKLAND: Yeah, I was. . . .

BLATT: Just a marvoulous person and I also had another very fine teacher by the name of L. W. Shoemaker. And L. W. Shoemaker had a strap in his desk, and if anything was out of line in any of the boys or any of the girls, it made no difference, he took us right out into the little cloak room and said, "Now you have this coming." And you-- and not

only did he take care of you, but when you got home your father took care of you also; and if your father didn't, your mother did. I can still remember when my mother--- going out and getting a little switch off of a cherry tree and trimming my hide, which I think was right. I deserved it.

SHANKLAND: Which is the complete opposite of today.

BLATT: And I'm certain should not be.

SHANKLAND: What were some of the most notable memories you had of Fannie Bruce? Like her book? I know you admired her very much. What are some of the things you really admired her for?

BLATT: She was just an honest individual, who would help you in any way she possibly could. She was just a saint.

SHANKLAND: About that book she wrote. What year did she write this?

BLATT: Let's see. She wrote that in 1952 or '53; the centennial was 1954, and she I'm sure wrote it in '53.

SHANKLAND: How did schooling play a role in the lives of the village people, especially the parents? How did they look at it for their youngsters?

BLATT: They gave the teacher sole--charge of that school. She had sole charge of the youngsters while they were under the hands of the teacher; and if they were wrong, the teacher

had the authority to do what she did to correct it. And I think it was a wonderful thing.

SHANKLAND: Yes, I do, too, can you recall when a three-year school was established in the Village of Elwood?

BLATT: No, I can't. That-- I had left Elwood in 1922.

SHANKLAND: That's right when it came in, I think.

BLATT: And I believe the high school was in '23. So I was away from Elwood from 1923 to 1931, when I moved back to Elwood.

SHANKLAND: Were you still continuing your education at this time?

BLATT: No. I was through high school. I was through high school in 1920.

SHANKLAND: Why was high school only three years' long compared to where we have four now. Why was it considered three. . . . ?

BLATT: I really couldn't answer that question.

SHANKLAND: Well, I was reading, and I was just wondering why.

BLATT: I really couldn't answer that question.

SHANKLAND: O.K., do you know why in 1946 the high school of Elwood was closed out?

BLATT: Yes, we became a unit district to the Joliet Township High School.

SHANKLAND: Which was Joliet High?

BLATT: Joliet High. And it was a small township high school, JTHS.

SHANKLAND: Would that be this building here?

BLATT: The main, yes, Central, today it's known as Central Campus.

SHANKLAND: Where were eighth grade graduates sent to, to continue on their education since this high school was closed down?

BLATT: Joliet Township High. They were all sent to Joliet High.

SHANKLAND: Finally, could you say that schooling was a worthwhile achievement for all people who attended it?

BLATT: Yes, definitely, as a must.

SHANKLAND: It was a must. Did the fathers of these families want their sons and daughters to go to school, maybe to carry on their business or trade or such?

BLATT: Not necessarily. I think they all wanted their children to have a better education than they had themselves.

SHANKLAND: I see. O.K., I'd like to talk a little bit now



about some of the change that took place in the 1900's.

I understand it to be that during the 1920's many changes did take place. And what changes can you witness taking place most specifically?

BLATT: Well, there wasn't too many changes in the town of Elwood in 1920. Until 1940 it went along just as a little, small town, farming community, with the elevators, and very quiet until 1941, I believe. The government came in and disrupted the entire area by purchasing all the land and turning it into an arsenal, known as the Joliet Arsenal today.

SHANKLAND: But in the 1920's wasn't there certain equipment and things that you could notice changes in?

BLATT: Well, of course, the automobile. That came in probably 19--oh, I can remember 1908 there just being about two automobiles in the town of Elwood; and from 1910 on up to 1920 it was a new industry.

SHANKLAND: Did you notice changes in farm equipment and that?

BLATT: Changes in farm equipment, yes. That would, oh, say probably 19-- let's see I worked on the farm in 1917, and 1918, and 1920 during school vacations, and that was all done by horses and very few tractors. The tractors came in probably in 1924 up to the present time. The telephone is another thing. There at one time in Elwood, there were two different telephone companies; and that has also

been dissolved into one, now as the Illinois Bell.

SHANKLAND: Did you notice any changes in maybe small items like appliances for the home or anything else in particular?

BLATT: Well, yes, we-- I would say the electric toaster, the electric coffee pots, the electric frying pans, all those came in that --- around that period. There were electric irons. I know they came in, and, of course, they were very crude but they were still an improvement.

SHANKLAND: A great depression took place in 1929. I heard that this depression didn't effect people in small towns such as Elwood. Do you believe this as being true?

BLATT: Yes, it did. It effected a great many of the farmers. Of course, the farmers owned part of their farms, and many of them had mortgages to pay off; and, of course, when there's no money to be had, they borrowed from the insurance companies and I know there were foreclosures at that time from the insurance companies. They could not meet their payments and the farms were resold for very little of the real value. I know one farm for sure, that was purchased by an insurance company that was foreclosed by the insurance company and resold to another individual at \$75 an acre. And I'm telling you it was really tough to get a dime in those days.

SHANKLAND: Yes. How did the depression effect people in general not--- I mean outside the farms?

BLATT: It was rough; it was rough for everyone. There was bread lines; there was no money; there was absolutely no money, and a great many of the people in my little town, they all had a cow, and they had chickens and they would take the chickens and the eggs, and they would trade them for groceries in the grocery store. The grocery store would sell them to people in Joliet. There was actually no money traded, changed hands; it was just eggs for oatmeal, or eggs for butter. And that's the way it had to be, in order to exist.

SHANKLAND: Did they grow a lot of their own food?

BLATT: Yes, they did. Practically everyone had a garden.

SHANKLAND: What age group, would you say, was really hit the hardest by the depression?

BLATT: I would say the age group would be from the thirties to the fifties because they had to feed the their families.

SHANKLAND: What was an average family size?

BLATT: The average family was four to six children.

SHANKLAND: That's good-sized. In 1932 the depression was considered to be at its worst peak. What real obvious changes or problems occurred in this three-year span, if you can recall any? Or was it just the same?

BLATT: It was the same thing. It was just try to get enough food to feed the family. That's what it amounted to.



SHANKLAND: When did the depression begin to slack off, and finally come to an end?

BLATT: I would say around 1935 and '36.

SHANKLAND: How did the people seem to get back on their feet? How did they rebuild their lives?

BLATT: Well, the value of the dollar was just changed, and they just had to do the best they could and work at whatever job they could get. They were glad to get any kind of a job in order to get some money to feed their families.

SHANKLAND: I would like to talk a little bit now about industries and manufacturing. What were some of the industries and manufacturing companies of Elwood?

BLATT: It was never a manufacturing place, never to this day---just strictly a farming community.

SHANKLAND: None of--- you can't remember any like different plants that were around Elwood?

BLATT: There were no plants. There were no plants. We didn't get any plants in that area until probably the last 20 years.

SHANKLAND: When these did come into effect, these plants? Who did they supply with their productive goods? What consumers?

BLATT: The only plants that are in that area are Mobil Oil plant, the gas plant and the arsenal. The gas plant was

built within the last three years. It's still strictly a farming community and still owned by the United States government and rented to farmers on a bid basis per acre.

SHANKLAND; I don't mean necessarily big plants, I mean like the tile and brick manufacturers, and you know, they weren't . . .

BLATT; There was a tile factory before my time south of Elwood, but. . .

SHANKLAND; And when did the grain elevators come into. . . ?

BLATT; They came in when Elwood was in its early days. They were first established in--- on around 1855 in that area. Actually, the elevators made Elwood. It was built around grain elevators.

SHANKLAND; And what were these elevators? I don't know what they were.

BLATT; An elevator is simply a storage place for corn, wheat, oats, and other grains until sold.

SHANKLAND; I see. These plants that did come in, where were they usually located?

BLATT; They were to the west of Elwood probably 7 or 8 miles west, and 7 or 8 miles north. You see the government still owns a great many thousands of acres down here, so there's no chance for really development in Elwood. The only chance

that Elwood has to develop in is the farming area directly north of Elwood. One of the farms was sold to a Chicago realtor or a Chicago syndicate who hoped to subdivide and enlarge Elwood, but Elwood now has annexed a farm to the village and it depends whether the future years will hold anything for it or not; we don't know.

SHANKLAND: What was the munitions plant's main purpose?

BLATT: They made shells and loaded shells for the United States Army.

SHANKLAND: It's always been that way. . . .

BLATT: It's always been that way since 1941.

SHANKLAND: That's when it opened.

BLATT: That's when it opened. And it closed after the war. Then it reopened for the other wars that have come and gone. I've seen the plant grow up in weeds three times. And it always comes back at a time of war and then they go back to production.

SHANKLAND: Can you recall how it operated?

BLATT: No. I was never a part of the arsenal in any sense. I don't know the operations of it.

SHANKLAND: O.K., and where was this located?

BLATT: East and west of Elwood. The loading plant was on

the east side of U. S.-- at that time it was U. S. 66A, it was on the west side for the manufacture.

SHANKLAND: I see. Could you describe a little bit about that Kankakee Ordinance works to me?

BLATT: That's the Kankakee Ordinance that I was speaking of that is the Kankakee Ordinance and the Joliet Arsenal.

SHANKLAND: That's the same name.

BLATT: Same thing.

SHANKLAND: Right along the same. . . Oh, I see. Do you remember when the first box of TNT was produced in this arsenal?

BLATT: No. It would be in 19-- I would say 40, '40, around '41.

SHANKLAND: So these two plants work together they just have different names for it.

BLATT: Different names, one was the Kankakee Ordinance Works. This was where they loaded the shells. And the other ordinance was where they manufactured it.

SHANKLAND: Oh, I see. So they really, the two plants really didn't have anything in common? They were two complete different operations, right?

BLATT: Oh, they were associated one with the other; you



can't have one without the other.

SHANKLAND: Oh, I know, but I mean each one has it's own separate purpose.

BLATT: Oh, yes, it's own area.

SHANKLAND: O.K., I see. Now I would like to talk a little bit on some of the historical thoughts. What significance did Jackson Creek play in the 1920's, if you can remember?

BLATT: Well, the Jackson Creek was the playground for the children in that area. That was our skating pond; that was our swimming hole; that was our fishing area. Today that's a thing of the past; the river, or the creek is unproductive of fish; it's polluted, which I'm sorry it hear. There's pollution in so many streams in this country. The swimming hole, of course, has disappeared. Youngsters today don't have the fun that we had.

SHANKLAND: Yeah, I kind of would like--- I would like to go back and just try to live then. I think it would be kind of interesting.

BLATT: Well, it would be a --- it's a fine thing when youngsters didn't have a lot of things to play. They'd have a couple games or they'd have roller skates or a bicycle, that's about all. You made your own fun. And if you wanted to go swimming, you'd just get the gang together and "Let's go swimming." You'd go down to the swimming hole and have a

good time. You'd go ice skating in the wintertime and build a fire along the bank and play shinny and really enjoy yourself; today you can't do that.

SHANKLAND: No, you had to be quite inventive, I can imagine.

BLATT: You really had to make your own fun.

SHANKLAND: What importance do you remember of Moldt's Grove?

BLATT: Moldt's Grove was a picnic area north of Elwood, approximately a mile and half north of Elwood along the Jackson Creek area. It was a place where they had fairs, the Jackson Township Fair; and a fair in those days was a competitive thing where the ladies would --- well, they'd can all kind of fruits, cherries, and all the vegetables and everything from the garden and they would take them and display them at the fairs. The farmer they would have horses; they have the pigs and they'd have chickens, all different types of animals, and they would then vie for ribbons. There was no amount of money concerned it was more for the honor of a blue ribbon that would be the first prize. And that went on for a number of years. I would say Moldt's Grove probably disbanded, I would say in 19--- oh, I would say around '16. It was probably the last fair that I can remember. And, of course, they had different towns, each one, each town surrounding Elwood had a baseball game. They would have a competitive baseball game. There were the Channahon Reds and the Elwood Grays, and the Manhattan Blues, I believe, was



the name of it. I can't recall exactly but that was a great day. Today they don't have them, they're just a thing of the past.

SHANKLAND: Yes. Do you recall how it got named Moldt's Grove?

BLATT: The people that owned it--- the land, their name was Moldt, and it became Moldt's Grove. That today is developed into a subdivision, a very beautiful subdivision.

SHANKLAND: It seems that all the parks have just turned into subdivisions filled with homes.

BLATT: They're gone.

SHANKLAND: Yeah. What do you remember about Reed's Grove?

BLATT: Reed's Grove was before my time.

SHANKLAND: Do you remember anything about your parents telling you about, it or anything?

BLATT: No. The only things that I do remember is the brown church that was located at the corner of Manhattan Road and Chicago Street. That building has been torn down and there was also another building there, Jackson Grange Hall, and that has, of course, been torn down.

SHANKLAND: Do you remember the Providence Ridge Church?

BLATT: Yes. I remember that; that's about two miles, three

miles east of Elwood and approximately two miles north, and the Providence Cemetery is still there. There are a number of cemeteries in Elwood. Jackson Township has the Brown Cemetery and then the Maple Hill Cemetery where my parents are buried and there was a cemetery situated in the arsenal area which is still there, but no one can visit it; it's a closed area.

SHANKLAND: In what way, if any, were you connected with this church?

BLATT: I was a member of the Elwood Methodist Church, which is now combined into a community church. There are two churches, the Presbyterian and the Methodist, and they combined it in the last five years or then years into a consolidated church.

SHANKLAND: What can you remember about its destruction when it was hit by the cyclone?

BLATT: Well, the cyclone really hit the Manhattan area to a greater extent than it did the Elwood area. It did a great deal of damage to the farm buildings and to the livestock.

SHANKLAND: Can you recall when the concrete highway was built from Chicago to St. Louis passing through Jackson Township in 1922?

BLATT: 1922, single lane. They made a four-lane highway in 1940, I believe.

SHANKLAND: Did you travel it very much?

BLATT: No. I don't recall very much about that. I know that when war was declared and the government purchased all the property down there, they immediately made a four-lane highway to the arsenal which was Chicago Street.

SHANKLAND: Were many automobiles used at that time? Were there many, did a lot of people have them or were they still just coming around. . . . ?

BLATT: In what time do you speak of?

SHANKLAND: 1922.

BLATT: '22, yes. There was a lot of automobiles, a lot of automobiles in '22. I remember in 1910 there was probably about two or three automobiles in the whole Jackson Township /Laughter/.

SHANKLAND: See you really had. . . How was transportation in those times carried on?

BLATT: Horse-and-buggy.

SHANKLAND: Horse-and-buggy. I can recall. . . .

BLATT: I worked in a little grocery store in Elwood, and we would bring eggs into Joliet in 12-dozen cases. They were cases that held 12 dozen eggs, and we'd bring them into the market in Joliet and sell them and then have to drive back. It was a full day's journey to Elwood and back to sell our eggs.

SHANKLAND: I can recall my mom was telling me (she's from Quincey, Illinois) she grew up on a farm. Right now my uncles and relatives own a horse farm, and I used to go there when, well, I still do now and then. They still have a few old buggies around and she used to tell me about the same thing. I would like to go back and live during that time just

BLATT: Well, it's great to reminisce. It's great to reminisce.

SHANKLAND: This highway, what did it do for transportation, workers, etc. . ?

BLATT: Well, really it was for the people who worked at the arsenal. It did give a direct route from Chicago to St. Louis. Of course, it was one of the first good roads crossing the state or going the length of the state.

SHANKLAND: And what year was it made into a four-lane highway?

BLATT: I would say in '41, '42.

SHANKLAND: In kind of wrapping this up now, Mr. Blatt, do you think that Elwood has become a very prosperous city of Will County?

BLATT: Elwood will never become a real prosperous city, that's not the intention of Elwood. Because Elwood is strictly a farming community, surrounded by the Army land

which prohibits Elwood from developing.

SHANKLAND: I see. Mr. Blatt, going through all the past history of Elwood, how did you link together with Fitzgerald's Furniture Company here in Joliet?

BLATT: Well, through my high school years. . . .

SHANKLAND: How did you get linked together with Fitzgerald's because you mentioned earlier that you wanted to be in trade.

BLATT: I went to work for the Leath Furniture Company and Mr. Fitzgerald was manager of the Leath Furniture Company. And when Mr. Leath died, Mr. Fitzgerald and the rest of the boys that were working for him decided to go into business for ourselves. That was the start of the Fitzgerald Furniture in 1928.

SHANKLAND: I see. And this building was originally a railroad house?

BLATT: This building was a railroad freight house owned by the E. J. & E. It was a freight house and then the E. J. & E. bought it, and we bought it from the E. J. & E.

SHANKLAND: I see.

BLATT: In 1941 we purchased this and moved from our store on Cass Street down to this location.

SHANKLAND: O.K. I want to thank you very much for all your cooperation.

BLATT: I'm very happy to do this and I hope it does some good for you.

SHANKLAND: O.K., thanks again.

BLATT: Thank you.

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